

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING  
AB 2768 (Ahrens)  
As Introduced February 20, 2026  
Majority vote

## SUMMARY

Requires the California State University (CSU), California Community Colleges (CCC) districts (CCD), and private postsecondary educational institutions and independent institutions of higher education that receive state financial assistance to, and would request the University of California (UC) to, defer the unpaid portion of enrollment fees and costs for a student that is a foster youth or former foster youth, as defined, upon the student's initial enrollment at the postsecondary educational institutional until the student has received an initial disbursement of the student's financial aid award, as provided.

### Major Provisions

- 1) Requires, commencing with the 2027-28 academic year, CSU, CCDs, and private postsecondary educational institutions and independent institutions of higher education that receive state financial assistance to defer the unpaid portion of enrollment fees and costs for students who are foster youth or former foster youth upon their initial enrollment.
- 2) Requests the University of California (UC) to adopt the same deferment policy as enumerated in (1) above.
- 3) Applies the deferment to students who are foster youth or former foster youth, as defined, and as verified by a financial aid administrator.
- 4) Requires that deferment apply upon a student's initial enrollment and remain in place until the student receives an initial disbursement of financial aid.
- 5) Stipulates that enrollment fees and costs include, but are not limited to, all of the following:
  - a) Registration fees, including a statement of intent to register;
  - b) Mandatory campus fees;
  - c) Campus housing and meals (including any required deposits);
  - d) Health insurance;
  - e) Books, supplies, materials, equipment that may be required for enrolled courses; and,
  - f) Any associated costs of a summer course or program required to be taken for the student's chosen major.

## COMMENTS

*Addressing timing gaps in financial aid.* Financial aid is often disbursed after the start of the academic term, while enrollment-related costs are due earlier. This timing misalignment can disproportionately impact foster youth, who may lack financial resources or family support to

bridge the gap. This measure appears to address said gap by requiring institutions to defer payment until aid is received.

*Scope of covered costs.* This measure applies broadly to multiple categories of student expenses, including tuition, housing, food, and educational materials. By including non-tuition costs, the measure recognizes that barriers to enrollment extend beyond registration fees and may include basic living and academic readiness expenses.

### **According to the Author**

According to the author, "this bill holds deep personal significance for me, as I have firsthand experience navigating the foster care system and facing homelessness. My journey through the community college system and higher education played a transformative role in my life, providing me with the opportunities and support needed to build the career I have today. I am profoundly grateful for the access and resources that made this path possible."

The author further states that, "at the same time, my experiences have shown me that there are still gaps in support for students facing similar challenges. Many foster youth encounter barriers that make it difficult to navigate higher education, from financial instability to a lack of consistent guidance and resources. I believe there is more we can do to ensure these students not only access college but also succeed once they are there. This bill reflects my commitment to strengthening those support systems. By addressing these gaps, it aims to make college more accessible, navigable, and equitable for foster youth. Ultimately, it aligns with my goal of helping create a more supportive and empowering environment so that students with backgrounds like mine have every opportunity to thrive."

Lastly the author states, "AB 2768 seeks to eliminate inequities in higher education by directly addressing financial barriers that disproportionately affect foster youth, a historically underrepresented and vulnerable student population. Foster youth tend to experience higher rates of housing instability, food insecurity, and financial insecurity compared to their peers, all of which can impede their ability to enroll and persist in college. Although tuition may be waived, many essential costs such as housing, meals, books, and required summer programs remain and are often due before financial aid is disbursed. By allowing these costs to be deferred during a student's first term, the bill removes a key structural barrier and ensures that foster youth have equitable access to the same opportunities as other students."

### **Arguments in Support**

According to the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools (Edwin Gomez, Ed.D.), the sponsor of this measure, "foster youth face unique and significant educational challenges, including lower rates of academic achievement, graduation, attendance, and post-secondary attainment. According to the California Department of Education, only 60% of foster youth graduate high school, compared to 86% of non-foster youth. Frequent placement and school changes further disrupt learning, often resulting in the loss of critical academic documents and progress."

Dr. Gomez goes on to state that, "AB 2768 would allow first-term foster youth students to defer payment of essential enrollment costs—including the Statement of Intent to Register (SIR), any summer coursework or programs required for a student's declared major, on-campus housing deposits, and the purchase of textbooks—until their financial aid is available. While California has taken important steps to support foster youth by waiving *systemwide* tuition, tuition waivers do not cover campus-based costs. These expenses can create substantial obstacles that delay

enrollment, set the students behind in their studies, and/or force foster youth students to alter their academic plans. AB 2768 is a step in the right direction toward leveling the playing field for these students.”

### **Arguments in Opposition**

None on file.

### **FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

- 1) One-time Proposition 98 General Fund costs of an unknown but potentially significant amount, approximately \$1 million to \$2 million, for CCDs, collectively statewide, to update policies regarding fee deferrals for eligible students. To the extent a CCD's existing policies meet the requirements of this bill costs would be less.
- 2) Minor and absorbable costs to the CSU, UC.

According to the CSU, many campuses already defer or waive these costs for foster and homeless youth.

### **VOTES**

#### **ASM HIGHER EDUCATION: 10-0-0**

**YES:** Fong, DeMaio, Boerner, Macedo, Jackson, Muratsuchi, Patel, Ramos, Sharp-Collins, Tangipa

#### **ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0**

**YES:** Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

### **UPDATED**

VERSION: February 20, 2026

CONSULTANT: Jeanice Warden / HIGHER ED. / (916) 319-3960

FN: 0002744